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# COMMUNICATION

More Resources



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## Additional Communication Resources

This section contains a variety of helpful resources, including:

- Positive Communication Between Parents and Teachers: Tips for Teachers (from *Partnerships*)
- Positive Communication Between Parents and Teachers: Tips for Families (from *Partnerships*)
- Two-Way, Home-School Communication (ideas with explanations)
- Your Turn/What Do You Think (sample forms inviting parent/family input)
- Sample Back-to-School Letter
- Sample Homework Helper Form (inviting two-way communication regarding homework)
- Using Newsletters to Communicate With Parents
- Parents and School Staff Should Be Equal Partners (from *Beyond the Bake Sale*)
- Map Your School's Parent-Teacher Contacts (from *Beyond the Bake Sale*)

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# Partnerships

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## Positive Communication Between Parents and Teachers

### (Tips for Teachers)

by

Eva Patricakou, Roger Weissberg, Mayr Hancock, Michelle Rubenstein, and Jennifer Zeisz  
Laboratory for Student Success

One of the key goals of the Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) is to encourage school, family, and community partnerships to improve the academic performance and the socioemotional development of children and youth. Teachers face the challenge of educating an increasingly diverse student population, which is growing up in varied home environments. Families and schools are both active participants in the education of children and youth. Parents/guardians and teachers need to collaborate to improve student achievement and school performance. Family members and educators each have a distinct yet interrelated role to play, and each has an important voice to be heard.

The latest National Education Goals encourage schools to increase their efforts to involve parents or guardians in their children's education. Open communication between responsible, concerned adults in the home and at school is essential to building this partnership. The tips offered in this brochure can help teachers initiate constructive and consistent communication with parents to foster ongoing parental involvement.

There are four essential ingredients to building healthy, open communication between schools and families. These ingredients are the Four P's:

#### Positive

Too often students and parents are wary of a note or call from the teacher. Sending home words of praise and encouragement can change this perception and improve communication with the family. Remember, parents need a pat on the back, too!

#### Personalized

Parents can be overwhelmed by impersonal memos, which seem less relevant to their child. To help avoid the "junk mail syndrome," jot a quick personal note on letters home or have students decorate to draw parental attention.

#### Proactive

Keep parents informed of your class rules, expectations, and current activities. Provide plenty of notice for special events. Let parents know immediately if you have a concern, and work together to prevent problems from developing.

#### Partnership

Well-informed parents can work as partners in their children's education. Encourage parents to respond to your notes by leaving space for comments or including a few quick questions for return—this practice keeps you informed of parents' ideas and concerns.

*Partnerships* is a publication of the Laboratory for Student Success (LSS), the mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory at Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education.

## Getting Started

All written communication to parents should use simple, familiar language and short sentences. Be direct and avoid using educational jargon and long explanations.

If possible, use “attention grabbers” – upbeat graphics, bold headings, borders or boxes around special items, etc. Students can decorate invitations and letters going to their parents – this will help ensure that parents see your communication.

Always communicate respect for and appreciation of parents and families. Talking down to parents will put a quick stop to two-way communication. Be sensitive to cultural differences. Have your letters and memos translated into the first language of your students’ families. Integrate bilingual and multi-cultural materials into displays and written communications. Be persistent. Use a variety of methods to communicate your important information to families. See which format (note, newsletter, phone call, meeting, etc.) works best for different kinds of information. Use alternative methods to follow-up with hard-to-reach families.

### Send a welcome letter

Send a welcome letter to parents well before the school year starts to help them get their children ready for a new classroom. This letter may also be sent to the parents of students transferring into your class throughout the year. In it you should include:

- Basic subjects and major goals for the year
- Materials needed for class
- How and when to contact you (phone number and most convenient times to reach you)
- Your expectations for students’ work and behavior
- Suggestions for ways parents can be involved in homework
- A sincere invitation to share concerns, visit class, and provide support

### Remind parents to read the school handbook

You may want to highlight school policies and programs pertinent to your students (procedures regarding absences and tardiness, weather emergencies, after-school activities, etc.). Ask parents to discuss this information with their children.

### Encourage parents to attend the school open house or orientation

If your school does not sponsor such an event, hold one for your classroom. Publicize the open house on school bulletin boards and with community outlets such as grocery stores, banks, etc. Mail invitations to parents well in advance. Be prepared to review the information in your “welcome letter,” but recognize that the open house is a social event. Parents will want to get to know their children’s teacher and classroom in a relaxed atmosphere. Have displays and examples of last year’s student work to give parents an idea of your teaching style.

### Give parents a chance to express their needs and priorities

Encourage parents to share with you their goals about their child’s education. Ask them to express their priorities about their child’s academic and behavioral performance. Provide them with ways to enhance their child’s learning at home and extend the classroom curriculum in the home environment and beyond. Discuss with parents the best ways (e.g., phone calls, notes) to communicate with them on a regular basis.

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## Ideas for Positive Two-Way Communication

### Start a weekly or bi-weekly newsletter

Start a weekly or bi-weekly class newsletter. While this may seem an impersonal method of communication, it can be personalized in several ways: (1) pick a student to decorate the border and be the newsletter artist of the week; (2) feature an “academic star” and a “class citizen” of the week and note their recent efforts; and (3) include student and parent contributions on a regular basis.

The tone of the newsletter should be positive, highlighting recent accomplishments and interesting experiences of the class. The newsletter is a proactive way to inform parents of upcoming events and activities. It may also include a few tips for parents about helping with homework and boosting reading skills. To encourage parents to be involved, add a few questions for a “reader opinion survey” – post the results the next week.

### Greet parents personally as they drop off or pick up their children

This may require you to come in a little early so that you are organized before students arrive. Communication with parents in this informal manner helps increase the comfort level of two-way communication. It also reinforces the idea that parents and teachers know each other and are working together for the benefit of students. This is not a good time to discuss problems, but it may be an opportunity to set an appointment.

### Try to contact parents by phone at least once each quarter

A positive phone call acknowledging a student’s improved work or continued effort, thanking a parent for helping out on a class project, or personally inviting a parent to a special event will increase parents’ comfort in approaching you.

### Create a Family Bulletin Board

By creating a Family Bulletin Board in your classroom you can notify parents of upcoming events, display pictures from special occasions, and offer suggestions for parenting and home learning.

### Send students home with a Weekly Work Folder

Weekly Work Folders should be given to students every Friday containing their completed homework assignments, in-class work, and any tests or quizzes. Staple a blank sheet to the inside cover of the folder so that you can write a quick message to parents and allow space for them to respond.

### Recognize academic and behavioral achievement

Achievement certificates should be able to be taken home and displayed. These certificates can be formatted and copied in advance so that you can simply write in the child’s name and achievement. Certificates can also be used to thank parents for their efforts.

### Develop a parent feedback form

Parent feedback forms can assist parents in monitoring their involvement in important areas, such as praising their children, getting children to school on time, helping with homework, volunteering in the classroom, etc. These forms are also a good way to provide parents with additional ways they can get involved in their child's learning.

### Communicate personally with parents at least once a month

A quick "home-note" can encourage parental involvement by suggesting home learning activities. Clearly mark a parent response portion of each note to encourage two-way communication. Ask parents to comment or answer one or two questions relevant to the content of your note. Seek parents' input and feedback about the most effective ways to communicate with each other. Share information with other educators about successful parent involvement and communication approaches.

# Partnerships

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The latest National Education Goals encourage schools to increase their efforts to involve parents or guardians in their children's education. Open communication between responsible, concerned adults in the home and at school is essential to building this partnership. The tips offered in this brochure can help families establish great communication with their children's teachers.

Good communication between home and school is important to keep you in touch with your child's educational needs and success. Answer these following questions to see how you can improve your communication with your child's teacher:

Do you get the information you need at the beginning of the school year? Do you:

- Go to the school/classroom open house or orientation night?
- Have the teacher's phone number and know convenient times to call?
- Read the school handbook so that you understand school rules?

Do you let the teacher know that you want to be informed regularly about your child's schoolwork and behavior? Do you:

- Give the teacher your home and work phone numbers and a convenient time to reach you?
- Tell the teacher that you want to hear about both negative and positive issues with your child?
- Read and respond to all notes, newsletters, etc.?
- Ask about class rules, routines, and what students will be learning?
- Talk to the teacher as soon as you have a question or concern about your child?

Do you let the teacher know that you want to be involved in your child's education? Do you:

- Go to parent-teacher conferences and other school meetings?
- Ask the teacher how you can help with schoolwork at home?
- Volunteer to help the teacher in class or with special events?
- Ask the teacher when you can visit the classroom?
- Mark your calendar with special school activities and events so that your child is prepared for both of you to attend together?

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- Work with the teacher to clarify your child's academic and behavioral goals for the year?
  - Share information about your child's accomplishments at home or in extracurricular activities?

Do you act like a partner with the teacher for your child's education? Do you:

- Tell the teacher that you want to work together to solve problems?
- Let your child know that you support the teacher's classroom rules and work goals?
- Contact the teacher to let him/her know about things at school that your child likes?
- Communicate with the teacher when you have questions, concerns, or suggestions to improve your child's learning experience?
- Ask for suggestions about activities you can do with your child at home to build on what he/she is learning?
- Show respect for the teacher and school?
- Thank the teacher for his/her effort?

If you answered "YES" to these questions, congratulations! You have open and positive communication with your child's teacher. Here are some more tips to help you build on this strength.

More tips to enhance parent-teacher communication:

- Write a note on your child's homework to let the teacher know if the work was easy or difficult.
- Make an appointment so that you have time to talk with the teacher if you have a concern, and let the teacher know what you want to talk about.
- Talk about your concerns in a positive, problem-solving way. Avoid blaming or criticizing the teacher – especially in front of your child.
- Let your child know about talks you have had with his/her teacher. Children should see that open communication between home and school is a good sign of teamwork.
- Tell the teacher about any major changes in your child's life (death in family, birth of sibling, divorce, etc.) that may affect his/her schoolwork.
- Show the teacher your appreciation when he/she does something special for your child.

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## Two-Way, School–Home Communication

Idea	Explanation
Parent–Teacher–Student Conferences	Prepare an agenda for parent–teacher–student conferences that encourages the participation of all three parties. Let parents know the agenda in advance of the conference. How would the parents describe the child’s study habits at home? Does the child read at home?
Report Cards	Report cards are typically used by teachers to report the child’s progress in school to the parents. But report cards could become two-way by including the parents’ report of the child’s progress at home with such school-related topics as: 1) willingness to do homework, 2) reading for pleasure, 3) moderation of screen time, 4) attitude toward learning. The cards might also encourage parents to note specific concerns or request conferences.
School Newsletter	Many schools publish newsletters. To encourage two-way communication, ask parents to write articles for the newsletter. What tips can parents give for helping kids with homework? What family activities would parents like to share? Where has the family gone recently that was of educational value? Also, student contributions to the newsletter are good.
Happy-Grams or Good News Notes	Print pads of Happy-Grams/Good News Notes for teachers to send notes to parents complimenting students for specific achievements and behaviors. Because teachers also appreciate notes of kindness, distribute pads of the notes to parents or print blank forms in the newsletter. Parents can clip the forms out and send good news to teachers.
Open Door Parent–Teacher Conferences	Designate a certain time when teachers are available for walk-in conferences. Some schools set aside 30 minutes before school each morning (or on certain days of the week) when all teachers are available to parents.
Use a Texting Service and/or a Class Website	Encourage teachers and families to communicate through a texting service (such as Class Tag or similar app) or via a secure class website with a messaging option. These services (many are free) can provide avenues for both group messages that apply to all parents and for individual messaging to send and receive personalized communication for each family. Consult the district technology policy before initiating any service.
Suggestion Box	Encourage parents to drop suggestions in a school suggestion box. Report suggestions in newsletter.



**Your turn!** Please share any comments or suggestions about the communication materials I have sent home this week. Thank you!

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**WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

Please share any comments or suggestions about the communication materials we have been using. Thank you!

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## Parents and Students,

Welcome to the 2017-2018 school year. It is going to be an exciting one! To keep you updated about the many things that will be happening throughout the school year, we will be sending home a school newsletter during the first week of each month.

Our goal is for parents, students, teachers, and school staff to work together to promote children's success. We can work together to achieve this by:

- *Making sure children arrive at school on time. Classes begin at 8:30 a.m. daily. If children are late, they miss valuable learning time.*
- *Young children need plenty of sleep. Set an appropriate bedtime for your children so they will be well rested and ready to learn!*
- *Homework is given to students Monday through Thursday. Help review your child's homework. Make sure they have a quiet place to work and the necessary supplies to complete assignments.*

We look forward to seeing you at our Open House on September 12th at 6:00 p.m.

*Beethoven School and Health Center  
Working together to support  
school-family partnerships*



## Parents and Students,

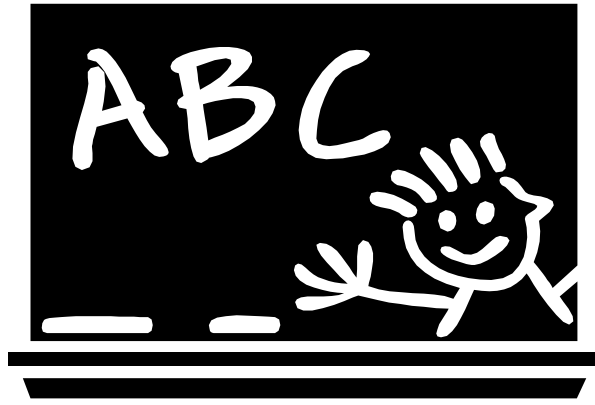
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# Good News Note!

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# Homework Helper



Here is some important information about the assignments for this week!



# Homework Helper

I had some comments and questions about the assignments for this week.



## Resources for Communication

The following information is from *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*, by Anne T. Henderson, Karen L. Mapp, Vivian R. Johnson, and Don Davies (pp. 36, 37-38).

### Parents and School Staff Should Be Equal Partners.

This chart contrasts what school staff might say about different topics, depending on whether the relationships in their school are lopsided or mutual.

Topic	Lopsided Relationship	Mutual Relationship
Academic Support	"Have your children follow my directions about their homework and other assignments."	"Here are some ways to monitor your children's homework and build their skills. Tell us what else you do to help your children."
Parent Support	"Train your children to respect and obey the school staff at all times."	"Let's work together to develop a code of conduct and promote appropriate behavior."
Status	"We are the professionals; don't question our decisions."	"Share your knowledge, skills, and culture with our students. Please let us know when you can come to class."
Participation	"Parents are welcome at school during designated times and events."	"You are welcome anytime! Please let us know what you want to know more about and when you can come to workshops and other activities that interest you."

Henderson, Anne T., Mapp, Karen L., Johnson, Vivian, R., & Davies, Don. (2007). *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*. New York, NY: The New Press.



## Resources for Communication

The following information is from *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*, by Anne T. Henderson, Karen L. Mapp, Vivian R. Johnson, and Don Davies (pp. 61-62).

### Map Your School's Parent-Teacher Contacts

A. Teachers, counselors, or advisors are expected to communicate with families:

- 1. When there is a problem
  - 2. At parent-teacher conferences
  - 3. At least once a month if the student is struggling
  - 4. At least once a month with every family
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

B. School-family communications tend to focus on:

- 1. Student problems and misbehavior
  - 2. General news about the class
  - 3. Progress in specific problem areas
  - 4. Overall student progress
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

C. When do parents and teachers have face-to-face contact (besides parent-teacher conferences?)

- 1. Some teachers attend PTA meetings and other events for families.
  - 2. All teachers attend at least one family-oriented activity each semester
  - 3. Teachers greet families before and after school
  - 4. Teachers routinely meet one-on-one or in small groups with families
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

D. How often do teachers send home materials that will help parents work with their children, such as learning kits or interactive homework assignments?

- 1. Rarely
  - 2. Maybe once a month
  - 3. It varies by teacher
  - 4. Every week
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

E. How is student work shared with parents?

- 1. Our school displays the work of top students only
  - 2. Parents can come to school and see work on the bulletin boards
  - 3. Teachers send home student work about once a month
  - 4. Student work goes home every week; parents and teachers comment on progress
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Add up your score. Give yourself a point of extra credit for each “other” response that moves your school toward open communications with families. The higher the number, the more your communications with families are open and trusting. If your score is 10 or below, develop a plan to open up communications with families.

Henderson, Anne T., Mapp, Karen L., Johnson, Vivian, R., & Davies, Don. (2007). *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*. New York, NY: The New Press.



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# COMMUNICATION

Community-Building Ideas



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## Communication

The primary purpose of the Communication component in building a goal-based school community is to help the various constituents of the school community meet the community's responsibilities of them.

There are essentially three forms of communication within the school community:

### *1) School Community Compact*

The School Community Compact is prepared and distributed annually by the school. The Compact informs parents, teachers, and students of the school community's goals and each person's responsibilities in achieving the goals.

### *2) Informational Communication*

Informational communication includes the school's efforts to inform school community members of school community activities. Informational communication also includes methods of providing helpful tips and practical suggestions for meeting school community responsibilities, as outlined in the Compact.

### *3) Two-Way, School-Home Communication*

The third form of communication – two-way, school-home communication – is communication between the school and home where information passes in both directions.

## School Community Compact

### Faculty Presentation of Preliminary *School Community Compact*

Contributing School: Darwin Elementary School, Chicago, IL

In the initial stages of community building, communication is crucial, not only between the school and home, but also within the school. Once the School Community Council has developed its goals and responsibilities, present a draft of the School Community Compact to faculty members during a school-wide faculty meeting. Give teachers a chance to make comments and recommendations on the work during smaller group sessions, and have them return the Compact to the School Community Council. The School Community Council can then incorporate relevant suggestions into the final draft of the School Community Compact.

### Brick by Brick: Distribution of the *School Community Compact*

Contributing School: Lawn Manor, Oak Lawn, IL

All schools must distribute a School Community Compact to make sure that everyone knows the responsibilities of the school community. In order to make sure that everyone sees the Compact, first send a one page "news flash" home to parents to pique their interest. Four days later, send home a one page summary of the school's goals and responsibilities for parents to review. Three days later send home the whole Compact, including a cover letter with one statement each for parents, teachers, and students. Each person must sign the statement as a gesture of commitment to the community-building process. Once each student has secured the signatures, he or she returns it to the school and earns the right to place a brick into the frame of a house which is on display in the front hall of the school. In this way everyone is involved in the effort to build a school community.

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## Informational Communication

### Report Card Pick-Up Days

Contributing School: Alcott Elementary School, Chicago, IL

Report card pick-up days are a natural opportunity for strengthening communication between the school and home relative to the school's goals and responsibilities. During pick-up days, set up a school community booth, attended by a member of the School Community Council. Distribute copies of the School Community Compact and other information about the school's goals and responsibilities. Provide a sign-up sheet for parents to become involved in community-building activities. Arrange a dinner after report cards have been picked up and use the dinner as a platform for introducing members of the School Community Council, reviewing the School Community Compact, and recruiting volunteers to help with community-building work and activities.

### Monthly Goal Flyers

Contributing School: Kingston Intermediate School, Kingston, IL

This method of communication promotes educational goals while helping parents and teachers meet the responsibilities of the school community. Each month, highlight a different goal by sending a series of flyers to parents and teachers. Send one flyer per week, each focusing on two or three responsibilities. The flyers should provide relevant and instructive suggestions for parents and teachers to help them achieve the goals of the school community. By the end of the month, every responsibility of the chosen goal has received attention.

### School Community Newsletter

Contributing School: Corkery Elementary School, Chicago, IL

Publish a newsletter designed specifically to focus on the school community. Include articles related to the school's goals and responsibilities, as well as notices about special events arranged by the School Community Council. Publish contributions by parents, teachers, and students alike.

### Newsletters Focus on Goals

Contributing School: Lawn Manor Primary Center, Oak Lawn, IL

In addition to telling about activities in the classroom, the school newsletter highlights one goal per month. Include a book list based on school experiences, as well as a monthly calendar of events. A brochure that explains the school's educational goals and responsibilities for students, teachers, and parents accompanies the newsletter at the beginning of the year. Kindergartners and early childhood students take home their own weekly letters.

### Special Section in School Newsletter/Newspaper

Contributing School: Alcott Elementary School, Chicago, IL

Devote a special column in the school paper to focus on the school community goals. For the goal of Studying, for example, establish a regular "Study Hints" column, which features articles on good study habits, the benefits of studying, and other suggestions for parents, teachers, and students to help them meet the School Community's Studying goal.

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## School Community Council Reporter for School Newspaper

Contributing School: Darwin Elementary School, Chicago, IL

Appoint a School Community Council member to serve as a reporter for the school newspaper. The reporter can cover the School Community Council's planning process directly, keeping school community members abreast of the council's activities as they occur, and publicizing special events arranged by the council.

### Parent Column

Contributing School: Prairie View, Sandwich, IL

Initiate a column written by parents called "Parents in Action: Sharing their thoughts about..." The column includes tips from school parents on how they help their children at home with studying, reading, etc. Some, for example, could be written by working mothers who give other mothers practical hints at how to find time to help children study.

### Letter from the Principal

Contributing School: Bethune Elementary, Chicago, IL

The principal writes letters to parents which are posted regularly in the school newsletter. For example, at Bethune Elementary, one of the principal's letters suggested six great ways for parents to encourage family reading over the holidays.

### Homework Newsletter

Contributing School: Northwest Elementary School, LaSalle, IL

Publish a homework newsletter as a cooperative effort between teachers, students, and administrators. Focusing on the goal of studying, the homework newsletter can serve as a forum for publicizing the school's homework policy, examples of good study habits, and ways for parents to help their children study. It can include contributions from all members of the school community: parents, teachers, students, and administrators.

### School Community Council Introductions

Contributing School: Pershing, Rawlins, WY

Use the school newsletter to introduce the School Community Council members. A short summary about them, their families, and why they are involved in the School Community Council gives the entire school community a sense of the School Community Council's identity.

### Signed Return Slip

Contributing School: Southeast Elementary, Sycamore, IL

To encourage reading of the newsletter, include a return slip in each issue. Any student bringing back a parent's signature on the slip becomes eligible for a raffle drawing for a small prize.

### Classroom-Based Newsletters

Contributing School: Pierce Elementary School, Chicago, IL

Each class develops a newsletter that focuses on the goals of the school community and classroom activities related to those goals.

## Introduction of Parents to the School Community Council

Contributing School: Southeast Elementary, Sycamore, IL

The School Community Council sends an informative letter to all parents explaining what the School Community Council is and what it has done in the school to date. In the letter, list members of the School Community Council and explain the selected goals, and ask for parental input on what steps to take next. Include a survey asking parents to contribute ideas under each of the goals for how the school community could work together to reach those goals. The idea of parents working together should be the theme of the letter.

### Mini-Classes

Contributing School: Southeast Elementary, Sycamore, IL

Rather than a traditional open house, this night gives parents an opportunity to get basic information about the classroom. Stagger the schedules in 15 minute blocks in each grade level so that parents with more than one child can visit several classes. Information on goals and responsibilities should be presented and discussed.

### Information Booth

Contributing School: Alcott Elementary, Chicago, IL

Set up an information booth on report card pick-up day to disseminate information about community-building activities. Distribute a copy of the goals and responsibilities to each parent along with their children's Compact cards. At Alcott, a school-wide assembly focused on decency, and a laminated poster in each classroom served as a constant reference point for the goals and responsibilities.

### Student Invitation to Open House

Contributing School: Northwest School, Lincoln, IL

As a classroom assignment (this assignment can be graded for grammar, spelling, etc. if desired), all students write personalized notes to their parents inviting them to attend the Open House. The parents sign the invitations and bring them to the meeting's main session. There the invitations are entered into a drawing box for chances to win prizes. This will draw students and parents to the desired meeting/open house and will generate increased interest in the meeting's purpose.

### Ice Cream Social

Contributing School: Littlejohn Elementary, DeKalb, IL

Organize an open house and ice cream social. Take this opportunity to divide parents into small groups and have School Community Council members explain and discuss the school community goals and responsibilities. Display the four goals on banners or large signs in conspicuous places and ask parents, teachers, and students to sign them in order to express their commitment to the goals. Provide entertainment for the children as necessary. In order to ensure a large turnout, send parents personal invitations in the mail or have teachers call the parents personally. At Littlejohn Elementary, the class with the highest percentage of parents present was rewarded with a pizza party. Any class with more than half of the parents present received a popcorn party.

### School Community Council Forum for Faculty and Parent Organization

Contributor: Dr. Paul Baker, Illinois State University

Plan a meeting of the School Community Council and the full faculty at the beginning of the school year. This would be a good time for discussion, distribution of the School Community Compact, and sharing ideas. The central purpose of the meeting, however, is to have the faculty select one of the

school's educational goals to highlight for the year. The highlighted goal then becomes the focus of the School Community Council's activity, and the faculty can be asked for suggestions to help all students reach the goal. By highlighting one goal per year with new initiatives, the school community will, over time, become expert in all goals. If possible, the School Community Council should also meet with the parent organization at its opening meeting of the year. The School Community Council needs to secure the participation of viable parent groups and draw them into a discussion of the highlighted goal.

## Clearinghouse

Contributor: Dr. Paul Baker, Illinois State University

Make sure that faculty and parents gain as much knowledge as possible about the highlighted educational goals. The faculty should circulate articles on the goals, bring in speakers or consultants for faculty study groups, learn about parental roles, and evaluate the curriculum to see how it supports the goals. Appoint a group of teachers and parents to serve as a clearinghouse on gathering, reading, and sharing the information. The school community can distinguish itself by becoming expert in its chosen goals.

## Community Awareness of School Community Council

Contributing School: Big Rock Elementary, Big Rock, IL

Post copies of the School Community Council's newsletter and announcements of events at the post office, on church bulletin boards, at the local restaurants and mini-marts, at market day pick-up, or any other place where the community regularly gathers.

## Banners

Contributing School: Big Rock Elementary, Big Rock, IL

Place large, colorful banners with the school goals on them around the building to stand out and remind students what they are aiming for.

## Parent Surveys

Contributing School: Lawn Manor Primary Center, Oak Lawn, IL

Send a Parent Survey home with students to be filled out and returned. Use it to discover parents' feelings on different activities and what they would like to participate in or volunteer for during the year. The survey should also ask about what factors contribute to non-participation in parent programs, such as babysitting difficulties, lack of time, lack of interest, or feeling uncomfortable. Include space for additional comments.

Contributing School: Southeast Elementary, Sycamore, IL

Survey parents frequently to get their input into decisions, and send the results of the surveys and their impact home with the students. Encourage parents to respond to the school office or drop ideas in a suggestion box. At Southeast Elementary, one survey helped the School Community Council come up with ideas for a welcoming sign for the school building. Parents responded with preferences for wall murals, quilts, banners, and student-created work.

## Student Video

Contributing School: Big Rock Elementary, Big Rock, IL

Video student-performed skits focusing on school pride and acceptable school behavior for parents to watch during an open house.

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## School Directory

Contributing Schools: Lawn Manor Primary Center, Oak Lawn, IL;  
Bell Elementary, Chicago, IL

Create a school directory. Some or all of the following information can be included: family names, names of children and their teachers, staff names and positions, all school phone numbers, bus company phone numbers, School Community Council members, a map of the school, and, of course, the goals and responsibilities. Be sure to get parents' permission before including anything about the children's families.

## Keep a Camera Ready

Contributing School: Lincoln/Tyler Schools, DeKalb, IL

Keep a camera and film at the school to use at all events, both for media publicity and record keeping.

## Goals and School Community Council Introductions

Contributing School: Prairie View Elementary, Sandwich, IL

Provide a list of the four educational goals to be placed on each student's desk at Open House. All School Community Council members should wear name tags to identify themselves. Hang a poster in the hall that introduces each School Community Council member and tells a bit about his or her family.

## Two-Way, School–Home Communication

### Happy Grams or Good News Notes in Newsletter

Contributing School: North Elementary, Sycamore, IL

Provide a blank Happy Gram or Good News Note in the school newsletter for parents to return to the school to thank teachers. Include a list of other ways for parents to thank them.

### Open House

Contributing Schools: Darwin Elementary School, Chicago, IL;  
St. Pius V, Chicago, IL; Bethune Elementary School, Chicago, IL;  
Kingston Intermediate School, Kingston, IL

A school-wide open house is a great opportunity for two-way communication between the school and the home while focusing on school community goals. If the open house is being held at the beginning of school, prepare posters in the summertime and hang them throughout the community to publicize it. Make the first session of the open house school-wide and introductory, reviewing the school community goals and responsibilities, and introducing the School Community Council members. After that, break down into individual classroom meetings, and have parents and teachers discuss the school's goals and responsibilities.

### Two-Way Happy Grams or Good News Notes

Happy Grams or Good News Notes are a common means for teachers to praise students. Normally a Happy Gram passes good news on to parents, but teachers deserve to hear good news, too. Distribute pads of Happy Grams or Good News Notes to parents, suggesting that parents let teachers know when their children have an especially positive learning experience or when the parents appreciate a particular approach a teacher has taken.

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## Family–School Community Activity Card

Contributing School: Martinsburg Elementary School

Each family is given an activity card at the beginning of the school year. Out of the seven family school events (four of them sponsored by the School Community Council), families are asked to attend and have their card punched at a minimum of four events. Those families meeting this goal are invited to the MES Family Celebration held in the park in May. Also, each time a family attends an event they are eligible to win a door prize.

### Two-Way Report Cards

Typically, report cards keep parents informed of the child's progress at school. Two-way report cards include a section for parents to report on the child's progress at home with school-related activities such as homework, reading, and attitude toward learning. Use the card to encourage parents to note specific concerns or to request conferences.

### Open Door Parent–Teacher Conferences

Contributing School: Hughes Elementary, Chicago, IL

Have teachers make themselves available for conferences with parents every morning (or certain mornings each week) before school for half an hour.

### Parent–Teacher Conference

All schools have parent–teacher conferences. To strengthen the school community's commitment to its educational goals, parent–teacher conferences can include a discussion of the child's progress toward the goals and encourage a flow of information in both directions.

### Telephone Message Systems

Contributing School: Malta Grade School, Malta, IL

Phone message systems for parents promote special events by the School Community Council, such as parent training sessions. Other schools also use them to warn parents of a school closing for weather or in case of other disasters or emergencies.

### Parent Hot Line

Contributing School: Lawn Manor Elementary, Oak Grove, IL

A parent hot line is in place so parents with questions or problems have a resource in other parents for information.

### Dialogues on Values

Contributor: Dr. Paul Baker, Illinois State University

A group of parents meet in a home, with a teacher present, to discuss the highlighted value, its goals, and expectations. This discussion would be informal. Dr. Baker says if each teacher met with a small group of parents in the home once during the year, it would have a dramatic cumulative effect.



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